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AFRICAN STUDIES BETWEEN AREA STUDIES TRADITION AND GLOBAL ENTANGLEMENT APPROACHES: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF COLOGNE

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ABSTRACT In the face of growing global interconnections, entanglements and conflicts as well as increasing awareness that such inter-continental linkages have considerable historical depth, African Studies—as well as other Area Studies—have increasingly come under pressure to re-contextualise their academic agenda as well as their place within their host institutions and the wider academic landscape. In Germany, African Studies encounter such challenges in a period in which comprehensive funding for Area Studies is available in highly competitive processes necessitating collaborations between area specialists, humanities scholars and more theoretically orientated social scientists. The key challenge is thus to maintain and develop strong regional expertise without neglecting a comparative and theoretically ambitious agenda. The University of Cologne has reacted to these challenges by establishing the Global South Studies Center (GSSC), an organisational framework that merges research from classical area studies disciplines and from the social sciences and humanities to open up new alleys for cross-areal and interdisciplinary collaboration, and facilitates public outreach to a variety of audiences. This article traces the establishment of this new organisational unit, its potential and the challenges it faces in giving special attention to African Area Studies.

Key Words: African Studies; Knowledge production; Area Studies; Globalisation; Global South.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike many other German universities, the University of Cologne (UoC) has never concentrated on only one particular regional research focus in the non-western world, but has always maintained a high diversity of Area Studies approaches. Hence a strong and internationally highly visible focus on East, South-east and South Asia has developed, as well as a vibrant research focus on Latin America, the Caribbean and the Atlantic. Africa-orientated research has been a focus of academic interest at UoC since the 1960s. Typically this focus has been primarily philological (as it was for Indian Studies, Chinese Studies and Islamic Studies). Concrete research projects on these regional foci have been based on disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary research groups with varying compositions, e.g., the Africa focus was characterised by a strong cooperation between Archaeology, Linguistics and Anthropology initially with Ecology and Paleocol-

ogy joining in later on, whereas the Latin American focus was constituted by history and Romance Studies and later joined by Economics. The East Asia focus has been mainly geographical and philological. Different regional foci also touched upon different timescales, with the East/Southeast Asia focus concentrating on the contemporary period, the Latin American focus on the past three hundred years and the Africa focus encompassing several thousand years of history. Teaching these research foci, however, took place in a compartmentalised manner with little interdisciplinary overlap; i.e., for the Africa focus this meant separate courses for Anthropology, African Linguistics and Archaeology.

When research agendas and aspirations for further collaboration had to be reconsidered at the beginning of the 2010s during the course of an application of UoC for Germany's Excellency Initiative, strengths and future synergies had to be singled out. The researchers involved in the founding process of what later became the Global South Studies Center (GSSC) were on the one hand vividly interested in the entangled nature of localised societies, cultures and ecologies; i.e., being Area Studies specialists, they were studying the local impact of global flows of ideas, people and technologies in specific settings. They also had a joint interest in developing theoretical paradigms that would allow for the description and analysis of economic, social-ecological and cultural transformations in what was coming to be conventionally dubbed as the Global South. The challenge was thus to create a common basis for tracing the intercontinental connections and flows characteristic of a rapidly globalizing world. These developments suggested a research focus on these entanglements and their comparison across regions.

The situation at the University of Cologne, of course, has not been extraordinary in any way, and is well comparable to that of other large German universities. It has been the challenge of Area Studies focusing on regions in the so-called Global South to combine a passion for and profound expert-knowledge of historically grown regional specificity with a meaningful agenda that challenges researchers to think outside their own "area boxes" and the ambition of contributing to a comprehensive theoretical endeavour. Much ink has been spilled debating the dilemma of this two-sided ambition, not only within Area Studies proper but also within the more 'systematic' disciplines, particularly in Geography (Sidaway et al., 2016), Anthropology (Slocum & Thomas, 2003) and History (Middell & Naumann, 2010).

With this contribution, we will only briefly touch upon these debates and different attitudes to them. Our main focus, however, will rest on the challenges of studies on Africa, Asia and Latin America and their place within the university, with a particular focus on the situation at the UoC. We will then describe how the UoC set out to explore new avenues and to fund a centre designed to provide a meeting platform and organisational hub for a hitherto loosely structured alliance of individual researchers from various disciplines working in the Global South. In conclusion, we will turn to African Studies at the UoC and sketch the challenges and opportunities resulting from the developments in this subject area.

AREA STUDIES IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION

The end of the cold war in 1989, provokingly dubbed as the end of history by the historian Francis Fukuyama (1989), and the intensifying dynamics of globalisation during the 1990s, have led to a profound crisis in Area Studies. However, the economic rise of East and South-East Asian states in the late 1990s, renewed interest in Africa and particularly the events following 9/11 have also brought about a renewed interest in and funding of area-specific expertise (Sidaway et al., 2016). In Germany, the motivations behind the increase of funding are twofold: On the one hand, it is widely accepted that Germany needs knowledge on regions across the world to live up to its economic aspirations and its hopes for security; on the other hand, strengthening Area Studies is also part and parcel of an internationalisation campaign aimed by German academia. Progressively more students from the Global South study at German universities, with Chinese students surpassing students from other countries and German students (specifically those from courses in Area Studies) visiting universities in the Global South.

The regional organisation of Area Studies, which only fully developed in the geopolitical context of the post-WWII period, can be described as an attempt to “delineate relatively large geographic regions that possessed some cultural, historic, and linguistic coherence” (Mirsepassi et al., 2003: 2). In Germany, however, some Area Studies’ disciplines, such as African Studies or Indian Studies, developed much earlier, with strong roots in Philology. This delineation of the disciplines incorporated in Area Studies is fairly uniform internationally and is loaded with considerable heritage, e.g., specialised libraries, narrowly defined professorships and course programmes as well as area-specific language courses. Independent of its specific institutional setup, however, Area Studies began to be the subject of general criticism from social sciences since the 1990s. The issues invoked by the critics are manifold but we can only touch upon three salient points here.

A first often-voiced criticism is the alleged naïve and essentializing understanding of space and place, the isomorphism between space and social identities, and the concomitant neglect of historical and contemporary global flows and entanglements. As Verne and Doeveenspeck (2014) argue, most proponents of Area Studies understand areas in a Boasian sense as products of historical processes. Historically-minded critical advocates of Area Studies point out, however, that global entanglements have always existed and have been acknowledged by them. Indeed, regional specialists, such as Caribbeanists, have constantly been dealing with the challenge of integrating the global into the local (Mintz, 1998; Slocum & Thomas, 2003). In other cases, however, disciplinary isolation has indeed been paired with a rather narrow focus on a specific region.

A second entry point of criticism was the alleged lack of universal theory and the absence of any interest in regularities of cultural, social and economic development. This epistemological criticism is reminiscent of the age-old controversy between the idiographic (i.e., case-oriented and descriptive) approaches, and the more theory-centred, nomothetic approaches, which seek to establish general pat-

terns and laws (*“Methodenstreit”*). The accusation of a lack of theoretical interest has been fiercely rejected and declared rather unproductive, particularly by representatives of systematic disciplines, e.g., from political sciences (Bates, 1997) and geography (Verne & Doevenspeck, 2014). After all, meaningful theory building can only be pursued on the basis of solid empirical data and in-depth regional knowledge. Undoubtedly, Area Studies have been “thick with theory and theoretical debates” and have spurred important theory production within the disciplines, as Szanton (2004: 22) argues.

A third important charge against Area Studies is their leaning towards and involvement in discourses of development and modernisation (Escobar, 1995) and their enmeshment into hegemonic geostrategic and military considerations reminiscent of their colonial legacy (Sidaway, 2013). Despite these objections, Area Studies constitute, in the words of Appadurai (2003: 17), “a tiny refuge for the serious study of foreign languages, alternative worldviews, and large-scale perspectives on socio-cultural change outside Europe and the United States”. Yet, as he goes on to argue, the Area Studies tradition has “probably grown too comfortable with its own maps of the world” (Appadurai, 2003: 17). In short, the current and historical dynamics of globalisation and the growing global interdependencies require a constant reconsideration of established, often euro-centric geographical divisions within Area Studies, e.g., the common separation of sub-Saharan and northern African countries. The task is thus to focus on (Braudelian) historical entanglements and to privilege the exploration of transnational, translocal and diasporic dynamics (Freitag & von Oppen, 2010; Middell & Naumann, 2010).

Taking off from this broad criticism the tasks ahead for Area Studies disciplines are apparently threefold at least. The first is a more serious engagement with what Connell (2007) calls “southern theories”, i.e., southern and postcolonial perspectives that challenge established forms of academic knowledge production and that will lead to the development of new ways of learning. A second important challenge is to transcend narrow regional categories by intensifying research on transregional, cross-cutting and possibly comparative thematic issues (Wissenschaftsrat, 2006). A third challenge is the quest for methods to research global entanglements.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN AND OTHER “GLOBAL SOUTH STUDIES”

The tasks outlined above, i.e., the integration of theories from the south, the development of cross-cutting research agendas that transcend regions, the exploration of alternative geographies and the quest for new methodologies are often hampered by the fragmentation of knowledge production within academia, as well as by other structural constraints. This is, amongst others, due to the institutional set up of academic research on Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as its heterogeneous approaches to research and teaching (Wissenschaftsrat, 2006). In what follows, we will briefly point to some of the challenges provided by the

characteristics of area studies based on experiences from the UoC and illustrated, where appropriate, with examples from this university.

These challenges correspond, however, with major findings of the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat, 2006) and thus certainly has validity for the situation of Area Studies at many universities in Germany and beyond.

A common challenge is the small-scale operation, as many regionally oriented disciplines are constituted as small units and are counted under what in Germany is called “*Kleine Fächer*” (small disciplines). In popular discussions, they are often cited as examples par excellence of academic ivory towers. They are neither an integral part of school teachers’ training, nor do they convey any clear-cut professional profile. They are often hesitant to commit themselves to the application of their knowledge, e.g., in the form of policy advice. Habitually they are institutionally fragmented and institutes rarely have more than three or four professorial positions. The Bologna Process, initiated in 1999 by 29 European countries to enhance international competitiveness and ensure comparability in quality and standard of higher-education qualifications stipulated the separation of BA and MA studies. The ensuing reforms contributed to these challenges: While a number of these disciplines are still provided with ample numbers of BA students, all have a distinct lack of MA students. This fact threatens in the long run disciplinary reproduction and weakens the position of these disciplines within academia. Additionally, the existence of these subjects is often endangered in times of austerity and restructuring, as the Wissenschaftsrat (2006) observes.

The UoC is an old, established and very large university (about 50,000 students in winter term 2016/17) that traditionally holds a broad range of Global South-related disciplines. It hosts a significant number of small Area Studies disciplines, such as Chinese Studies (three professors), Japanese Studies (two professors), African Studies (three professors), Egyptology (one professor), Indian and Tamil Studies (one professor) and Islamic Studies (three professors and one assistant professor). Social and Cultural Anthropology (four professors and one assistant professor) takes up some typical Area Studies discourses but also hosts a comparative research agenda. Together, these institutes form a department-like “*Fächergruppe*” (subject areas), “Non-European Languages, Cultures and Societies”, in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, which at this stage is a loose institutional set up. Budgets, positions and BA/MA courses are still tied to the individual institutes.

Taking a wider glance at disciplinary engagements relevant to the Global South, there is also, for example, a Department of Iberian and Latin American History within the larger History unit of the UoC’s Faculty of Arts and Humanities (three professors and one assistant professor) and two professorships for Latin American Literatures. The large Institute of Geography in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences has a Human Geography section with a strong specialisation in East, South and Southeast Asia (three out of four professors). These examples reflect the heterogeneity of institutional integration. However, they also point to the challenge of a multitude of methodological approaches and foreshadow challenges to come when the need arises to define common research

themes.

There are at least five distinct approaches and perspectives that can be singled out; (1) social sciences approaches, relying on quantitative and qualitative methods and focusing on social dynamics in specific localities, (2) cultural studies approaches, focusing on discourses, narratives and symbols with the relevant methodological tools, (3) geographical approaches, dealing with the interrelation between human/social activities and connected spatial and physical-geographical phenomena, (4) historical approaches, working with written sources and oral testimonies, and (5) linguistic approaches, based on detailed analyses of spoken language acts and texts. These approaches are linked to very different theoretical strands.

This disciplinary fragmentation is also mirrored by characteristics of the researchscape. Unlike, for instance, in the natural sciences, a relatively small number of third-party funded research projects is typical. Funded projects often consist of one Principal Investigator (PI) and one or two PhD candidates and have a budget of around €200,000 for a two or three-year funding period. Data is not centrally stored but often stays with the PI and occasionally also with the PhD candidate(s). After the closure of the project phase such data often becomes unavailable. There are, of course, no laboratories in the disciplines we are touching upon here. Laboratories, their technology and their management structures ensure that subsequent generations of researchers can work on closely related topics with a similar methodological set up. In Area Studies disciplines, the focus of research may change substantially once a professor leaves and is replaced by a new one; i.e., Area Studies are not only small and fragmented, they also often lack continuity of research and theoretical engagement.

The issues of small project size, institutional fragmentation and the lack of central administrative hubs described above entail significant coordinative and administrative costs for many Area Studies institutes. Additionally, these conditions lead to specific challenges regarding particular strategies for outreach, internationalisation and early researcher support. Coordination and management structures are rare to absent meaning there are usually no support staff to facilitate the organisation of workshops, lectures and the sharing of information with the wider public.

This last point, the dissemination of research into the wider public, deserves specific attention: Throughout Area Studies and related disciplines, scholars bemoan the fact that there is little outreach ensuing from their research activities. This concern ranges from unprofessionally designed websites to the lack of capacity for organizing public outreach events such as panel discussions or lectures that address a public beyond the academy. In general, neither the scientific community nor the public is well informed about research activities in the Global South. This is the more striking as there seems to be a vivid and widespread interest among the public for such topics.

A WAY FORWARD: THE GLOBAL SOUTH STUDIES CENTER AT THE UOC

The successful application of the UoC in the third line of funding in the German Excellence Initiative in 2012 finally opened the way to establish a centre for studies on Africa, Asia and Latin America and to address the above-mentioned challenges. The UoC's institutional strategy "Meeting the Challenge of Change and Complexity", which constituted the core element of this application, flagged up Key Profile Areas (KPAs). KPAs were intended to "represent internationally competitive research foci with substantial critical mass and that address topics of high scientific, technological, or societal relevance" (University of Cologne, n.d.: 10). KPA IV, "Socio-Economic, Cultural and Political Transformation of the Global South", represents the UoC's strength in research on various regions in the southern globe.

The Global South Studies Center, or GSSC, was designed as an organisational unit and as a "platform" for a large group of Principal Investigators (PIs) originating from various disciplines. We will describe the center's operational design in a nutshell: The organisational unit, the head office and central coordination unit, has core personnel that—amongst other tasks—administers the center's funds and provides overall coordination and a range of services, such as public relations and scientific data management, including long-term research data storage. Qualification for membership as a PI is based on measurable activities regarding publication, research and third party funding, and is granted to postdocs and professors on application. The center's Executive Board screens the application. The Executive Board consists of six elected PIs, including the speaker and vice speaker of the center. It is also responsible for strategic planning and for the reviewing of applications for internal funding. PIs of the center benefit from their involvement in the GSSC, as they can tap in the center's funding (following an application process for internal funding) and benefit from the services of the head office. Funding is provided for, amongst other things, proofreading of publications, the invitation and hosting of visiting colleagues and fellows, workshops, reconnaissance travel and the promotion of gender equality.

The PIs remain members of their own institutes and departments, where they teach and also have their offices. Most importantly, the GSSC sees the high degree of disciplinary diversity as a distinct advantage and seeks to maintain this creative diversity while strengthening intensive collaboration between these diverse theoretical/methodological strands. Such an approach has proven successful, as the history of Area Studies in the United States shows: "... Area Studies Centers, which made no claim to being departments or disciplines, but instead were structured and understood as venues for cross-disciplinary discussion, debate, programs and projects (...) fit more readily into the culture and structures of the university, and have been far more accepted and successful" (Szanton, 2004: 18). The vision of the GSSC is partially reflected in this quote. It creates a platform for discussion and projects, lectures and workshops, and indeed, there is a broad range of such activities, ranging from public lectures on a regular basis to a bi-annual conference.

However, the scope of the GSSC goes beyond this in a number of important

points: (1) It acts as an incubator for application to coordinated, third-party-funded programmes within and across the attached disciplinary departments; (2) it provides an umbrella structure across departments and faculties for the administration of joint projects; (3) it aspires to create an academic environment conducive to the academic development of junior researchers and suitable for the integration of international guests and fellows; (4) it fosters internationalisation through a number of distinct activities, e.g., by hosting a third-party-funded global thematic network titled “Remapping the Global South” (<http://gssc.uni-koeln.de/daad>), which includes partner universities in Argentina, China, India and South Africa; and (5) it enhances the international and national visibility of interdisciplinary studies on cultural, social and economic transformations in the Global South, amongst other means through a range of public outreach events, social media channels, the GSSC website (<http://gssc.uni-koeln.de/>) and the online journal “Voices from Around the World”, run by the GSSC’s postdoctoral fellows (<http://voices.uni-koeln.de/>).

The GSSC started off in 2014 with a comprehensive research agenda to overcome the multiple divides within area-specific studies by focusing on processes of mobility and exchange and on the resulting translocal connectivities. Therefore, the PIs formed four separate yet interconnected fields of study that address salient dynamics in the Global South: (1) “Citizenship and Migration”, which mainly focuses on the ways in which migrants are granted or denied access to citizens’ rights; (2) “Migration and Labour”, focusing on—amongst other issues—the impact of indentured labour (coolies) on transculturation processes; (3) “Commodities and Changing Markets”, focusing on the global production and flow of (natural) commodities and how this affects societies and environments; and (4) “Communicative Repertoires”, which focuses on the transformation of verbal and non-verbal communication. The work of each research area is supported by a postdoctoral fellow financed from the GSSC’s core funding.

By the end of 2016, the GSSC had 42 PIs from a total of 14 disciplines, including Anthropology, Geography, History and Latin American History, African Studies, Modern China Studies, Romance Studies and Islamic Studies. More than 40% of all PIs were junior researchers, i.e., postdocs and junior professor (assistant professors). In 2016 the GSSC started its own graduate class (“Decentering Europe: Comparative Perspectives from the Global South”) within the a.r.t.e.s Graduate School for Humanities at the UoC (<http://artes.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/>).

WHY GLOBAL SOUTH?

Why did we choose the term Global South as an umbrella term, a term whose current usage often remains metaphorical and enigmatic, as is bemoaned by many scholars? Critiques hold that the term is most frequently used as a substitute for older notions such as Third World, thereby evoking notions of poverty and (under) development (Pinheiro, 2013). Scholars frequently point out, therefore, that the term needs further conceptual refinement and theoretical discussion, and indeed this remains one of the GSSC’s challenges (Hollington et al., 2015).

We hold that the concept of the Global South currently has (at least) two uses:

First, it is indeed used as a replacement for former concepts which are no longer appropriate, such as the Third World or the Developing World. It is thus used as a (geographical) proxy for the areas in which many Area Studies researchers are actually doing their fieldwork. A second reading of Global South goes beyond spatial ascriptions. It is thus not conceptualised as defined by clear spatial boundaries but rather as an emergent topography of historically evolving and overlapping networks of exchange, of dominance and exclusion and identity ascriptions. It is constituted of linkages and negotiations between people and institutions, as well as by flows of people, goods, institutionalised practices, symbolic repertoires and ideas. The Global South, in this reading, can be anywhere, in Los Angeles or Berlin as well as in Dhaka or Johannesburg. In both readings, however, we follow the Comaroffs, who suggest that we are in a period where it is the Global South that “affords privileged insight into the workings of the world at large” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015). As such, the PIs of the GSSC hold that the Global South is a descriptive working concept, which we use to challenge our analytical agenda. The name of the GSSC thus reflects the center’s programme.

CONSEQUENCES FOR AFRICAN STUDIES AT THE UOC

Finally, we would like to discuss the consequences of a Global South-oriented focus on African Studies at the UoC, which has been driving the ambitious formation of the GSSC. This has helped to put Africa-related research on the centre stage of a large university and at the same time has bridged internal institutional divisions. At the UoC, African Studies have been actively pursued at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology (three professors), in the Institute of Geography (one professor), in History (one professor) and of course at the Institute for African Studies proper (another three professors). In fact, all of the professors concerned with African Studies at the UoC have become PIs in the GSSC, most of them being founding members. They all still teach their standard disciplinary BA and MA courses, but with the new MA course Culture and Environment in Africa (since 2009), which also attracts African students, predominantly from anglophone Africa, there is also a cross-departmental course. All PIs profit from larger numbers of African students at the UoC, and after almost ten years of teaching, this course’s merits have become clearer: Not only does the African Studies focus contribute to academic capacity building, but nowadays a good number of graduates have become academic teachers in their own right and are substantially helping to foster the research activities of PIs from Cologne or are assisting in teaching students at the UoC and other universities.

Not only are students from Africa coming to Cologne in larger numbers than before, but also senior and junior researchers. The GSSC facilitates this constant flow of scholars from Africa to Cologne, for example through the above-mentioned thematic network “Remapping the Global South”, which cooperates with the University of the Western Cape (Cape Town, South Africa) as one of four global partner universities. It has also brought many scholars from universities in the Global North to Cologne whose work focuses on Africa and on cross-cutting

issues related to the work of scholars concentrating on Africa.

The constant inflow of fresh perspectives and ideas is key to the development of new research perspectives, which we will exemplify with selected research on human-environmental relations in Africa at the GSSC. In Social and Cultural Anthropology, this research has shifted in focus from adaptationist ecological anthropology (Bollig, 2006) towards political ecology (Bollig & Lesorogol, 2016; Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2016). This entails a slight shift in focus from a deep and archaeologically based history to a focus on more recent history (Bollig & Olwage, 2016). It has increasingly incorporated perspectives that transcend spatial scales, for example infrastructures and energy generation (Greiner, 2016), agrarian value-chains (Dannenberg & Nduru, 2013) and communication technologies (Krone, Dannenberg, & Nduru, 2016). The project “Translocal relations and the reorganisation of social-ecological systems”, for example, researches into the relation between labour migration and social-ecological change in rural sending communities. Empirical research focuses on two settings, the cut-flower industry around Lake Naivasha, Kenya, and the mining industry in South Africa’s Northern Cape Province. Labour migration and rural-urban relations in both settings are directly driven by foreign economic investments. The environmental impacts of migration in rural home areas, be they part-time pastoralism (as in the case of South Africa) or investments in sugar cane plantations (as in the case of Western Kenya), are analysed against the background of a political ecology of translocal relations (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2016). The project focuses on the role of socio-economic stratification and unequal mobilities and the relation between global drivers and local transformations (Naumann & Greiner, 2016). The Local Institutions in Globalized Societies (LINGS) Project has conducted research on the institutional dynamics of rural water management in north-western Namibia. In the early 2000s the Namibian government embarked on an ambitious reform programme. Previously state-managed water points were handed over to newly established water-point associations. The reorganisation of rural water supply in Namibia was intimately connected to global concerns on water-management. In fact, the institutional reorganisation of water-management was based on blueprint formulations taken from the 1994 Dublin accord to which also Namibia is a signatory state (Kelbert, 2016, Bollig & Menestrey-Schwieger, 2014). The Namibian waterpoint associations were meant to organize all matters around water supply independently. They were also meant to charge for water usage. How they were supposed to do so, was not well defined in the policy: They were torn between water fees paid according to the quantities of used and flat rates taking the same amount from each household. How new institutions develop (and existing ones are changed) is the key question of the long-term project (Schnegg et al., 2016).

Engagement in the GSSC has thus opened up a number of new thematic venues for researchers from the African Studies nexus. There is certainly more concern for translocal connections and flows, be they rural-to-urban (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013) or transnational, such as the migration of Africans to China and the Gulf (Pelican, 2014a, 2014b), global music-scapes (Hollington, 2016a; Schulz, 2012), histories of coerced labour (Lindner, 2016) or the transfer of institutional designs (Lindner, 2014). Pure linguistic approaches have become de-

emphasised in the context of the GSSC's research on Africa towards a more socially motivated account of linguistic and other forms of communicative repertoires (Hollington, 2016b; Lüpke & Storch, 2013), and the role of the media has become prominent, e.g., in the study of religious practices (Schulz, 2015; Zillinger, 2014).

In setting these new themes, GSSC-affiliated PIs are following theoretical developments internationally, e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff (2015) and Ferguson (2015), who are trying to reposition Africa and Africans in the wider world. The theoretical insights of the authors mentioned have added significantly to the development of globalised African Studies research at the UoC. It is a privilege of GSSC PIs focusing on Africa-related themes that they can directly link and compare their insights to similar activities in Asia and Latin America. Conferences hosted by the GSSC, large numbers of workshops, and numerous invited lectures have contributed to the formation of an epistemic community, which is still rooted in Area Studies expertise but aspires to address globalisation effects in their thematic fields of interest.

In the long term, the structural endurance of the GSSC, of course, depends on its success in attracting third party funding to major long-term interdisciplinary programmes. From the perspective of the UoC, however, the professional outreach activities for the dissemination of Africa-related research and a profound contribution to the internationalisation of student and teacher bodies at the UoC adds to the stability and endurance of the centre.

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NOTE

We use the terms "Area Studies" interchangeably with "Regional Studies", the former being more common in the Anglophone world, while the latter is established in the German academic tradition as "Regionalstudien" (Wissenschaftsrat, 2006). Furthermore, we define Area and Regional Studies not necessarily as an independent discipline—although this can be the case, e.g., in African or South-East Asian Studies—but rather as an interdisciplinary research context or a regional specialisation within a given discipline, e.g., a specialisation on Africa within a Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology.

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